# **Farmers engagement: experiences from Africa RISING in Ethiopian Highlands**

Africa RISING in Ethiopian highlands is a five year research for development project. It is being implemented in eight kebeles found in four big regions. The eight kebeles were selected on the basis of specific criteria including previous experiences of the partners, areas presenting opportunities for sustainable intensification, and sites undertaking crop, livestock, tree and NRM activities. Since 2012 the project engages quite a number of farmers (men, women and youth) in all the research processes including diagnosis, participation of different on-farm research trails and demonstration and evaluation, decision making and capacity building activities through different approaches. Figure 1 and the following will summarize farmers’ engagement experience of the project in Ethiopian highlands.

## **Farmers engagement during diagnostic (system understanding) activities**

Africa RISING project in Ethiopia devoted the first year of its project period for understanding the farming systems and communities by undertaking participatory assessments of the bio-physical and socio-economic issues in the crop-livestock-tree farming systems of its research sites. It was critical to do so for a project like Africa RISING that focuses on sustainable intensification which is taking in to account the whole farming system and the farmers. The main purpose of assessing and characterizing the farming systems and communities is to bring farmers to the center of the project research to play a role of telling their story, their farm and the system they are operating their day to day business including the markets, services, policy and institutions. These helped the project to identify key research thematic areas which was translated in to a number of demand driven and integrated action research protocols through networks of interlinked innovation platforms. Although there are different approaches that can be used for understanding the key issues that hinder sustainable intensification, the project prefers to use the following participatory assessment tools/approaches to engage men and women farmers and local stakeholders for system understanding:

* [Rapid telephone surveys](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41927/AR_Brief7.pdf?sequence=4)
* [Sustainable Livelihood Asset Evaluation (SLATE)](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41930/AR_Brief5.pdf?sequence=3)
* [Rapid market assessment](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41929/AR_Brief4.pdf?sequence=4)
* [Participatory community analysis](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41926/AR_Brief6.pdf?sequence=4) (PCA)
* [Agro-ecological knowledge toolkit](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41928/AR_Brief8.pdf?sequence=4)
* IMPACTlite
* Value chain studies

The following methods were employed in all the research sites to approach and engage farmers:

* Focus group discussion with different groups of farmers (men, women and youth)
* Household survey for different diagnostic agendas that represent the population of the research sites (wealth groups, age, sex, leadership, geographic locations)
* On farm interview, nursery survey, telephone survey, feed calendar,

The number of local partners from research centers, Universities, government extension and administration departments and NGOs) that have been partnered in each of the research site centrally trained to elicit and analyze local knowledge of farmers. This has helped to the project team to identify thematic research areas for interventions. From the above listed participatory toolkits/approaches the number of local partners engaged in data collection during the [PCA](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41926/AR_Brief6.pdf?sequence=4) and [SLATE](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41930/AR_Brief5.pdf?sequence=3) only reached 60 from all of the four project sites and they have engaged a total number of 900 farmers. The trained partners from the research sites have been the one who collected information form the farmer and analyzed to characterize the farming systems and communities. They have been members of the innovation platform networks established at woreda, Kebele and community level and play a key roles in implementing the designed integrated interventions, demonstrations and communications. Most of the 900 farmers engaged in the two assessments and other farmers engaged in the rest of the participatory assessment tools and approaches have understood our project purposes and objectives. They have also owned the project and provided enormous information without hesitation.

## **Selection Processes of Participating Farmers**

Two different approaches have been used to identify participating farmers in the different action research activities in the project. These approaches are:

a) Identifying interested farmers through presenting the research protocol idea and criteria to a number of farmers gathered in a meeting. After all farmers have awareness about the Africa RISING project during 2013 diagnosis phase and demonstration of participatory variety selection of wheat, potato and faba bean then farmers interest to participate raised. In 2014 cropping season CGIAR centers have developed research protocols to implement based on the thematic areas identified and the project with its local partners organized community meeting to present the protocol in local languages and identify interested farmers to participate in the action research. A total of 33 action and exploratory research protocols produced and able to engage more than 700 hhs in all the four sites. An example on how we engaged farmers in technologies selection: Introduction of high value trees research protocol was presented by ICRAF to all invited farmers in each of the eight kebele. Then interested farmers who agreed on the criteria including access to irrigation water registered. The research team verified whether the farmers qualify to manage the intervention through various ways.

b) Before selecting farmers and implementing research activities, review of research protocols was done on innovation platform meetings organized at strategic woreda level. In 2015 cropping season all research protocols have been shared on the 3rd planning meeting of strategic IP for the sake of seeking feedbacks from local partners and farmers and contextualizing the research ideas to site specific problems. The number of action research in 2015 cropping season is about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and the total number of farmers engaged is nearly 1000 hhs.

Participating farmers in the project are well organized based on commodity they participate which we call it innovation cluster or farmers research and extension groups. These groups have been established in each kebeles and they count up to nine groups. They are organized in group for the following reasons:

* creating of an opportunity for practical learning exercise among the farmers in each group on planting, managing and harvesting of the commodity they are working on
* to be represented in decision making processes during innovation platform meeting at woreda and kebele level through their representatives
* to create farmers to farmers extension for increasing the adoption of the technologies they are working on

## **The principles, guidelines and standards that the project follow while engaging farmers**

There are a number of values Africa RISING is applying while engaging farmers and these can be summarized as follows:

* **Confidentiality**: those farmers who have been engaged in providing information have been informed about the project purpose and told that all information they provided is confidential
* **Trust building**: creating trust by farmers on the project is a must to create ownership-this is being achieved through respecting and engaging all groups of representatives of farmers in the whole project phases
* **Respecting views and opinions**: value farmers views and opinions while engaging on research, workshop and trainings
* **Value indigenous knowledge**: farmers have a good reason on making their own decision in their livelihoods
* **Inclusive**: the project engages all groups of farmers (men, women, youth, wealth, influential, discriminated, poor and landless) during diagnosis and target most of them based on priorities
* **Building their local capacity to innovate**: all participating farmers are grouped based on commodity as an innovation cluster/farmers research groups for strengthening their collaboration and information sharing in each research
  + From each research groups or innovation clusters representatives are selected for kebele level operational level and woreda level strategic IPs for creating two ways of information sharing and create iterative learning that is designed per one crop season or every year

## **Participation of farmers in different regular and non-regular events**

**Site specific farmers’ field days**: is organized every year in research sites to demonstrate the different on farm research trails and participatory variety selection before harvest. As an approach the field day is organized one day a head of the strategic IP evaluation meeting to give a chance for members to see on farmers’ field. The farmers’ field day is organized in the two kebeles research sites in each woreda and participants include national level partners including research protocol owners (CGIAR centers), all IP members from woreda and kebele, other non-participating farmers and local media. The main objective the farmers’ field day is to demonstrate research trials on farmers field for all participants to learn from the participating farmers and researchers involved. Farmers’ field day is the big event of the project used for demonstrating all research activities and technologies performing on farmers’ field. Almost all partners of the project have a chance to see what the project is introducing and how participating farmers are evaluating the various research undertakings. It is also a market place for development partners to identify technologies preferred by farmers for taking it to scaling up.

**Innovation platform network:** Farmers’ representation (gnder, sex, wealth) in each innovation platform is given duet attention. We have innovation platform set up at three level and the following explains from bottom to up:

* **Innovation cluster/farmers research and extension groups:** in each research sites the project is working with more than nine farmer research groups or innovation clusters established on commodity basis. This is to create learning and sharing within the group on each commodity. Almost all participants are farmers. Each group nominate its representative from men and women farmers. These representatives are members of the kebele operational IP and share the concern of their groups on the platform. Training on planting, management and utilization is given for each group on the crop, livestock and tree related research activities and also a practical training on handling machineries and other technologies is given for farmers.
* **Kebele operational IP:** more than half of the members are farmers representing all the different innovation clusters and the others are kebele level organizations represented for technical advises and mobilizing community on agreed research activities. Five members of each operational IP is nominated to be members of the woreda Strategic IP for sharing and learning processes between kebele and woreda level.
* **Woreda strategic IP:** the representation of farmers are here less because of number of local and national partners represented in this IP. Those five members selected from each operational IP are members of this platform.

## **Engagement during implantation**

After intervention farmers were identified through such participatory and interactive process, researchers went to research implementation phase. A mechanism was set up such that the very young innovation platforms, which have farmers as members, would start contributing on research implementation.

* The different research protocols are introduced to the IP members. Technical and resource related issues are discussed thoroughly before protocols are endorsed (this could go as far as totally changing research agenda!)
* After research proposals got the green light, a visit to intervention farmers is made to make sure if experimental plots/field are in accordance with the criteria (Biophysical, socio-economic) set for the implementation of each protocol (This could be related with land size, labor, access to water, soil type, slop etc.)
* A team of researchers, IP TG members, site coordinators and intervention farmers participate in this plot/site validation work.

During all this process we make sure that farmers’ perspective contributes in making the design and implementation of the interventions demand driven. Meaning, we try to make sure that;

* The process is participatory enough and is open to dialogue and negotiation
* There is a shared understanding on research objectives
* Incentives are well aligned
* Power relations among different actors are well managed and brokered

1. **Participation in decision making**

Farmers involve in decision making at different phases of research interventions. Their involvement can be categorized into three phases at; *Pre-implementation, implementation* and *post- implementation.* For this purpose we considered *implementation* as the stage where the actual experiment or action research is executed on the field. On pre-implementation phase, farmers engaged in identification of research problems, workability of proposed research and site/plot selection.

During the *implementation* phase, farmers are not only active participants but leaders of seasonal evaluations that are used to assess technology performance based on a set of criteria jointly developed by farmers and researchers. At this stage a decision is made on which technology to promote, what needs to be improved or what further research is needed.

On *post-implementation* phase, farmers are mainly involved in technology multiplication and pre-scaling/scaling up work. Decisions involved at this stage are more of social/institutional than technical. This called for joint engagement with local partners like district agricultural office, NGOs and FBOs (Farmers Based organizations) as opposed to involving only intervention farmers. We have drown lesson that more work is needed in identifying niches and innovation networks to better engage farmers in the social/institutional decision making process.

To make sure that farmers are included in decision making processes, Africa RISING is using participatory research approaches and farmer engaging platforms.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Phases** | | |
| Pre-implementation | Implementation | Post-implementation |
| **Major engagement platforms** | A number of Participatory diagnostic studies (about 9!); Innovation clusters (FRGs) | Community level field evaluations ( Mid and end season evaluation); Innovation clusters (FRGs); Strategic Innovation platforms; Operational Innovation platforms | Strategic Innovation platforms; Operational Innovation platforms; Innovation clusters; FBOs |

**Kebele**

**Sub-kebele**

**Village**

**Farmer Group**

**Individual household**

**Research institutions**

**CGIAR**

**National**

IP representative farmers Consultation and Involvement

Kebele IP meetings

Woreda strategic IP meetings

**Farmers in different**

**levels of IPs**

**Farmers’ and actors involvement in Africa RISING**

**Woreda IPs**

**Kebele IPs**

Time

Figure 1. Engagement process diagram (Adopted from-Jim Ellis Johns, 2014)

**7. Incentive mechanisms**

Africa RISING project of the Ethiopian highlands has been using quite a few incentive mechanisms to make sure that long term community benefits will not be at stake because of insensitivity to short term expectations. These incentives can be in the form of cash or in kind. The project has a guideline concerning payments for farmers and other local partners during participation of various events (Annex 1). Events include field days, experience sharing visits, trainings, workshops and survey activities. These events can be organized in places where farmers have to expend money for transportation and meal. In such cases Africa RISING makes sure that such farmers are compensated. When there is no expenditure, there is a strict policy of not paying money for farmers. Farmers also receive benefits such as inputs (fertilizers and seed) when they manage participatory varietal selection (PVS) trials. If they are managing community seed increase activities, the research team from concerned CGIAR center or local partners backstop on technical issues. In this case farmers purchase all the inputs.

Experience sharing events, trainings, our participatory research approaches and gender sensitivity are other forms of incentives that are helping Africa RISING in making farmers see the benefits of our research interventions.

**8. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Apart from the program level monitoring and evaluation framework that is done by IFPRI, ILRI has set up its own [M&E framework](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/59772/AR_Ethiopia_IPmoneval_2015.pdf?sequence=1) when it comes to farmers’ and other actors’ engagement in the research activities. By drawing a lesson from previous ILRI Research-for-Development projects, we are monitoring and evaluation actors’ engagement process using a number of M&E tools that were developed using the KIDS (Keep it descriptive and simple!) approach. Through this framework farmers and local actors are involved in;

* Developing a quarterly action plan for the IP TG members
* Monitor activities outlined on the action plan on IP meetings
* Field visit, data collection and compilation on biophysical interventions
* Assign M&E personnel that champions the M&E work and collect data on jointly identified indicators (change in actor linkages; actor representation, capacity development; IP contribution to research and process facilitation)
* Identification, record and selection of MSC (Most Significant Change) stories emerging from AR interventions

# Annex 1. Guidelines on Payments to Africa RISING Partners

The issue of payments to partners in projects like Africa RISING is a sensitive one.

Clearly there is a need to incentivise and remunerate partners for the efforts that they make on behalf of the project. However, it is essential that these payments (including in-kind contributions) are made in a way that is equitable across all partners and does not compromise the activities of other organisations by inflating the remuneration market. The situation with Africa RISING is complex as the project involves a relatively large number of CGIAR partner organisations (as well as local partners) who all have their own different rules and guidelines on such payments. This document defines some standard criteria for Africa RISING collaborators to follow when establishing payments to partners.

## Who Might be Eligible for Payment?

The following categories of partners should be considered:

**Farmer**: Farmers participating in Africa RISING should receive some form of compensation for the time and effort that they dedicate to the project. Direct cash payments to farmers are not generally recommended as they can distort expectations and lead to friction amongst recipients and non-recipients. An exception to this might be where a farmer has resorted to public transport to attend a meeting or function at, for example, the Woreda headquarters. Any form of farmer contact should, generally, respect their status as equitable partners in the project and the nature and extent of any in-kind contributions should reflect this.

**Development Agent and Kebele administrators**: Levels of participation by DAs are likely to be variable across sites depending on capacity and levels of motivation. Where DAs are participating actively in Africa RISING’s research activities, this should be recognised by some form of top-up payment. To some extent, this will have to be determined on an *ad hoc* basis with an agreed number of days being paid at a standard daily rate.

**Woreda Official**: Woreda and zonal experts and officials may participate actively in project activities, in which case they should be appropriately remunerated at the same level as participating researchers (see below). Sometimes, some woreda officials may request a “facilitation” payment for assigning their staff to Africa RISING activities, without actually participating in Africa RISING activities themselves. This is to be strongly discouraged. Site coordinators need to explain that such payments are not allowed under the Africa RISING project and would be unacceptable to our project auditors. Should these requests persist, site coordinators should refer them to the Africa RISING management team.

**Researcher (University / Research Centre)**: All researchers participating in the project should be treated equally in terms of the remuneration that they receive. Site coordinators and other project staff will need to determine what is an appropriate level of participation and by whom in order to discourage the establishment of a development tourism industry around the project.

## What Amount is Appropriate for each Type of Partner?

The following table suggests the level of remuneration that is appropriate for a particular activity:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Recipient / Activity** |  |
| **Farmer** |  |
| *Participation in survey / PRA interview etc.* | Payment should be in kind (farm implements that cost not more than 50 birr). |
| *Participation in on-farm research field-day events* | Refreshment (soft drinks and cookies) |
| *Participating in trainings, workshops* | If the training and the workshop are conducted in the kebele, the participants will be provided with lunch allowance of birr 50 per day. If the training and workshop are conducted outside the keblel farmers will be provided per-diem and accommodation that amounts to 200 birr per day. |
| *Travel Expenses* | Reimbursement for transport will be based on receipt |
| **Development Agent** |  |
| *Participation in on-farm research activities (monitoring, advice delivery etc.)* | Lunch allowance of 135 birr as per ILRI rate (current rate is 30% of 450 birr= 135 birr). |
| *Accompanying researchers during field visit* | Lunch allowance of 135 birr as per ILRI rate (current rate is 30% of 450 birr= 135 birr). |
| *Participating / facilitating site or kebele level meetings* | Lunch allowance of 135 birr as per ILRI rate (current rate is 30% of 450 birr= 135 birr). |
| *Participating in trainings, workshops* | If the training and the workshop are conducted in the kebele, the development agent will be provided with lunch allowance of birr 135 per day. If the training and workshop are conducted outside the keblel, the DA/s will be provided per-diem and accommodation that amounts to 400 birr per day. |
| *Travel expenses* | Reimbursement for transport will be based on receipt |
| **Woreda Official** |  |
| *Participation in project meeting / workshop* | If the training, meeting and the workshop are conducted in the kebele or in the wereda town where they come from, the officials/experts will be provided with lunch allowance of birr 135 per day. Group lunch can be arranged depending on the circumstances. Coffee and tea health breaks can be managed by the training, workshop and meeting organizers. |
| *Field visit* | Lunch allowance of 135 birr as per ILRI rate (current rate is 30% of 450 birr= 135 birr). |
| *Travel expenses* | Reimbursement for transport will be based on receipt |
| *Participation in project level meeting (e.g. in Addis Ababa)* | ILRI per-diem rate + accommodation |
| **Researcher (University / Research Centre)** | |
| *Participation in project meeting / workshop* | If the event takes place in the residence town, lunch allowance will be provided (135 birr). If conducted outside the residence town, they will be provided per-diem as per ILRI rate + accommodation. |
| *Field visit* | If the event takes place in the residence town, lunch allowance will be provided (135 birr). If conducted outside the residence town, they will be provided per-diem as per ILRI rate + accommodation. |
| *Participating in extensive field studies/surveys* | ILRI per-diem rate for all + accommodation if they spent night/s outside residence town. |
| *Travel expenses* | Reimbursement for transport will be based on receipt |
| *Participation in project level meeting (e.g. in Addis Ababa)* | ILRI per-diem rate + accommodation |